Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food

# Farm & Food Report

Communications Branch, Walter Scott Building
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Saskatchewan

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Week of February 26, 2007

## SKILLS TRAINING PROGRAM A HIT WITH FARM FAMILIES

Apparently, it's never too late for Saskatchewan farm families to learn something new. They are accessing learning opportunities through the Canadian Agricultural Skills Service Program (CASS), which began offering support and assistance in June 2005.

The Centre for Agribusiness Training and Education (CATE), which is a branch of the Saskatchewan Council for Community Development, helps to deliver the CASS program by maintaining a listing of training courses in Saskatchewan that are registered with CASS.

The program is aimed at farm operations with net family income under $45,000 per year, as well as at new entrants to farming. Financial support is available which, depending on the qualifying income, can go as high as $16,000. Funding is available for tuition and other related expenses such as textbooks, travel, and even replacement labour, if necessary. Interested people can call the CASS toll-free line or visit the CATE website to get information on the program, and then start looking for programs in their areas.

A wide range of skills training options are offered on the CATE website, and Dirkson says there has been a great deal of interest from producers who are looking for training options, particularly in computers.

"They are realizing that they need computer skills in order to move their farms forward," Dirkson stated. "You can start at basic computer training and move all the way up to advanced skills." According to Dirkson, the majority of farmers investigating computer training programs are older adults. Courses are available from a wide variety of public and private institutions.

In addition to computer training, Dirkson says many farm families are accessing the CATE website in search of training to augment or create off-farm income. Some of the more popular areas on the CATE website relate to "welding, trucking for people getting their 1-A licenses, and a lot of health care therapies," she noted.

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There are also numerous offerings in the program specifically intended to assist farmers in enhancing their business management and agricultural practices.

Anyone interested in accessing the CASS program should call 1-888-887-7977 or visit the CATE website at www.agtraining.ca.

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## SASKATCHEWAN INLAND PORT CONCEPT GAINING MOMENTUM

The proposal to develop a multi-modal inland port in Saskatchewan to handle container-shipping is moving forward step by step.

The idea is being championed by Saskatchewan Agrivision Corporation, with the support and assistance of Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership and the regional economic development authorities of Regina, Saskatoon and Moose Jaw.

The inland port concept first came to life in 2001, and after some unsuccessful attempts to move it forward, Agrivision Executive Director Al Scholz says the group realized that the shipping industry must be brought on-side. It was that realization which led to a presentation to industry leaders in Vancouver this past January.

"We contracted one of the leading North American transportation consulting companies, TransSystems, to help prepare a Saskatchewan business case that addressed key North American needs. This was completed in early January and presented in Vancouver to the shipping lines, the big retailers and the ports," said Scholz.

Scholz describes that meeting as a success. "We knew this concept had to make sense to the big global and North American players. They said they like the Saskatchewan concept because it can help solve their problems."

"If they sign on and we can pull this thing together, it would solve our own local problems in terms of timely access to export containers, which will support expanded value-added processing throughout the province."

The idea for an inland port was first developed in response to the challenges faced by value-added agricultural processors looking for access to offshore markets.

In the modern world of transportation, there is a rapid shift from bulk to containerized shipping, particularly in Asia and Europe. Due to historical distribution patterns in Canada, those containers pass through Saskatchewan on trains both full and empty, but are not off-loaded here for reuse.

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As a result, export products such as pulse crops must be shipped to Canadian ports in bulk, where they are then bagged and containerized.

"We are asset-light in Saskatchewan in terms of transportation infrastructure," said Scholz. "But since Regina, Saskatoon and Moose Jaw are so close together in relative terms, and because each has linkages to major transportation corridors, the inland port idea can combine the assets of all three cities."

Ultimately, the development of this concept could see Saskatchewan become a major Canadian and North American trans-shipping centre, where entire ships from Asia would be off-loaded and the cargo moved directly to Saskatchewan for distribution to the end destinations.

As well, the inland port would assemble entire container shiploads in Saskatchewan for direct loading onto ships at port. This concept follows the Kansas City model, a multi-modal inland port with "free trade zones," which has resulted in the large manufacturing industry that is using offshore components to build products for U.S. markets.

Saskatchewan Agrivision and its partners have engaged an American transportation systems consultant, John Vickerman, to help develop and articulate the idea and its benefits. In March, Vickerman will present the Inland Port Business Case to representatives of the Saskatchewan government and other stakeholders in the province.

"There are four aspects to any project: management, marketing, technology and money," Scholz stated. "When you've got the first three, the money comes."

Working with the consultant and stakeholders, Scholz says Phase Two will involve completing a detailed business plan for the Saskatchewan inter-modal inland port. Work will commence the summer of 2007 and be complete early in 2008.

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## CHICKPEA RESEARCH YIELDS IMPORTANT FINDINGS

The results of a research project aimed at finding ways to reduce producer costs for growing chickpeas came to one overwhelming conclusion: don't cheap out on fungicide application.

The research was conducted over a three-year period by Wheatland Conservation Area Inc., a non-profit producer-run organization in Swift Current. Funding for the project was provided by Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food (SAF), through its Agriculture Development Fund, and the Saskatchewan Pulse Growers Association.

Bryan Nybo, the Farm Manager for the Wheatland group, says the intent of the study was to improve the bottom lines of producers.

"Producers in south-western Saskatchewan have been growing chickpeas for a number of years with good financial success. In many cases, this gave farmers the economic boost they needed to make their operations viable," said Nybo.

However, with the advancement of ascochyta, a disease common to chickpeas, and lower chickpea prices, Nybo says producers were losing this economic advantage.

"In order to help them regain these advantages, we wanted to look at ways for producers to adequately manage the disease risk while, at the same time, reducing the production costs associated with this crop," he stated.

Experimenting with both Sanford and CDC Yuma chickpea varieties, Wheatland examined four different avenues for lowering production costs: seeding rates, fertilizer rates, row spacing, and fungicide application.

The largest treatment effect observed in the study dealt with crop variety. There was much lower disease pressure and much higher yield in CDC Yuma chickpeas compared to Sanford. However, according to Nybo, only one of the four variables studied produced a big effect on the bottom line. "Our main finding was that if you try to cut down in your fungicides, you're in big trouble," he said.

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"The main risk to chickpeas is ascochyta. Controlling that risk proved to be the overwhelming factor in the whole project. We found that, as soon as you try to cut down on fungicide, you were really increasing your exposure."

Nybo says fungicide can be a large cost to producers, particularly when they have to spray several times during the crop year. "At $20 or $25 per acre per application, it gets to be quite a bit."

Nybo feels the best bet for making chickpea production more profitable for farmers may be more research, specifically in developing new varieties. He says the Crop Development Centre (CDC) at the University of Saskatchewan has been producing terrific results in improving disease resistance in chickpeas.

"The task can be pretty difficult and time-consuming, but some of the chickpea varieties out now are much, much better than what we've seen in the past, going to the fern-type leaf rather than the unifoliate-type leaf, which seems to have a big advantage."

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## PRINCE ALBERT FARM FAIR RETURNS FOR 21ST YEAR

Prince Albert will once again be the site for meeting neighbours, getting up-to-date on new technology, and placing orders for the new season.

The Prince Albert Farm Fair returns for its 21st year at the Prince Albert Exhibition on March 21 and 22.

The annual farm trade show is a joint project of the Prince Albert Chamber of Commerce and the Prince Albert Exhibition Association.

"We try to pick a time when farmers are thinking about what to do for the next growing season, or livestock producers are making their plans for the spring season prior to calving," said organizing committee member Roger Swanson of the March timing for the event.

The fair includes an indoor trade show, outdoor equipment displays, educational seminars and direct sales of everything from seed to cattle feeders.

"We've had as many as 100 exhibits, so it's absolutely crammed full in the hall," said Swanson.

"It's a one-stop event where farmers can view the displays, discuss things like what to seed, and hear about the latest technologies."

A sample list of exhibitors includes companies like Monsanto, Bayer, Dow and Syngenta, as well as seed suppliers, machinery parts and service operators, and suppliers of livestock management products.

"The exhibitor companies are given space at the show to put on private seminars for their customers, so that attendees can hear about their products in a separate session without leaving the site," said Swanson.

Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food will also be on site with a variety of educational resources. The department's annual "Crop Talk" session, presenting a number of speakers on issues of interest to producers, will be held on March 22.

In addition, there will be information on areas such as new course offerings at regional colleges and environmental planning initiatives.

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Swanson says the fair provides an excellent networking opportunity. "It's business plus social. A lot of farmers come to talk to the exhibitors, and to talk to each other," he noted.

"It is the time where they have to make the decisions about what to plant, so the timing is good for the upcoming crop year."

As many as 3,000 people are expected to attend the two-day show. The entry fee is just $2 per day.

Swanson says the fair is a great example of the Prince Albert Exhibition's mission to be a facility "where town and country meet," and of the regional nature of the Prince Albert Chamber of Commerce.

He says there is no question that the city also experiences a direct benefit from the event. "You better believe it. People are going to eat at our restaurants, fill up with gas, and shop in our stores."

Additional information on the Prince Albert Farm Fair is available at www.pachamber.ca, or by calling the Chamber at (306) 764-2222.

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## AG-MANUFACTURERS ATTENDING PARIS SHOW

A strong contingent of Saskatchewan agricultural implement manufacturers will be in Paris next week (March 4 to 8) for SIMA - The Paris International Agribusiness Show.

The trade show is the largest in the world, attracting over 198,000 people from 108 countries.

Saskatchewan will be well-represented this year. A number of manufacturers will be a part of the Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership (STEP) delegation.

Borgault Industries, Norac Weighing and Control Systems, New Concept Industries, Pattison Liquid System, Schulte Industries, Case New Holland, Brandt Agricultural and Morris Industries will all join STEP at SIMA.

"I am really pleased to have so many people involved in this show – SIMA is a huge opportunity for Saskatchewan exporters. Seldom is there this kind of intensified magnitude of return. It is the crème de la crème of shows and represents the opportunity to have single point access to huge markets like China and India but also to more strategic markets, like the fast-growing economies of Poland and Hungary, that are particularly strong agricultural regions," said STEP President Dale Botting.

Rob Ziola, STEP's Manufacturing Trade Team Director says that, although STEP has been a participant at SIMA in past years, this is the first year that STEP will be an exhibitor at the event.

"SIMA is the second largest agricultural exhibition in the world. Exhibiting at a show of this magnitude should not be underestimated. European clients take these shows very seriously, and they view a booth investment as a serious commitment to the marketplace. When people from the trade come by the booth, it is not a casual drop by. They want to have a meeting. The attendees at this show are from the trade. They are wholesalers, importers, farmer co-operatives, and, as such, they are looking to buy more than one or two pieces of equipment. This show allows STEP, and its participating members, to gain valuable trade contacts from across the world, in one location." said Ziola.

Botting says Saskatchewan manufacturers have led the way for years when it comes to both innovative and quality products, and that reputation is well-known in the world market.

(more)

"We invest heavily in research and development here and we have lots of opportunity to gain real world experience – but in some ways it comes back to the spirit of the people who broke the ground and planted the first crops here. That same sense of innovation still exists today, and that's why our products are in demand in the world market," said Botting.

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